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Memory through monuments: Movement and temporality in Skamby's boat graves

Howard Williams

Boat inhumation graves were one among many ways by which waterborne craft were deployed in the mortuary arena in late first millennium AD Scandinavia: they might be represented on stone, burned, decommissioned or set adrift. Moreover, smaller craft and parts of craft might have been readily employed in inhumation and cremation practices far more than is revealed in the archaeological record. Further still, boats can be symbolised through boat-shaped stone-settings and their depiction on picture-stones (see Andrén 1993; Williams et al. 2010).

Consequently there are strong grounds for seeing boat-inhumation as part of a diverse versatility in mortuary expression drawing upon water transportation as metaphor and medium. Yet within this diversity, I here contend that the high archaeological visibility of wealthy boat-inhumations was not an accident of archaeological preservation. Instead, I argue that boat-inhumation was a strategic choice to exhibit and constitute a distinctive identity for the dead using a specific use of a maritime vessel in early medieval mortuary practice. Hence, as technologies of remembrance, boat-inhumations are the surviving archaeological traces of a distinctive chains of ritual acts by which the dead were selectively remembered and forgotten by survivors and interred unburned within a maritime craft (Williams 2001, 2006). Moreover, boat-inhumation was a practice that rendered the grave persistent in the landscape as an ongoing place for memory work, prone to subsequent manipulations, whether sanctioned interventions by the survivors or plundering inspired by a range of motivations (e.g. Bill & Daly 2012).

Previously I have advanced the argument that boat-inhumation constituted a distinctive mortuary process and mnemonic efficacy by exploring the arrangement and staged consignment of material cultures within a late sixth-century boat-grave from Snape, Suffolk (Williams 2006:

123-135) and the multi-sensory display of chamber-graves within (for Mound One) and beneath (for Mound Two) boats of the early seventh-century within a 'princely' cemetery at Sutton Hoo (Williams 2006, 135-41; see also Williams 2011). In the early Anglo-Saxon context, inhumation within an entire waterborne craft was a rare and therefore striking phenomenon amidst societies well-versed in cremation as a disposal method; at both Snape and Sutton Hoo, boat-inhumation were ritual crescendos towards the end of a genealogy of shifting mortuary performances at each place. In this way, emerging elite groups were telling new stories about themselves and marking themselves apart from predecessors and contemporaries (Carver 2000, 2005: 492-92; Williams 2001, 2006: 158-62).

In a different, later early medieval context, I have argued that the Norse tradition of boat-inhumation was also a memory-making ritual process that held specific socio-political connotations within the context of the Viking diaspora to the British Isles. Exploring the evidence from the Isle of Man, I proposed that the sequence of composition of the grave and monument construction was as important as the final burial tableau in understanding how boat-inhumations operated as memory work and in constructing a statement about imagined and claimed origins and identities within a context of Hiberno-Norse land-claims and identity-formation (Williams 2006: 172-75).

Through these case studies, boat-inhumation can be regarded as a varied and context-specific phenomenon operating in relation to other uses of boats, rather than bearing a static socio-political message or religious meaning (inspired by Carver 1995). Burying the dead with boats was utilised in specific and different contexts in the early medieval world as a means of materialising ideologies, identities and social memories in the landscape. Hence wealthy boat inhumation was a distinctive and different public strategy for honouring the elite dead. This mortuary choice simultaneously articulated senses of belonging and constituted distinctions from other contemporary groups through the medium of mortuary theatre (see also Andrén 1993; Back Danielsson 2010; Carver 2000; Jennbert 2006; Price 2010).

However, these recent interpretations have their limitations. For the present discussion, these are twofold. First, approaches to boat-inhumation graves have remained artefact-focused, with monumentality and landscape providing little more than a backdrop to the focus on the wealthy artefacts, materials and substances mobilised for dramaturgical deposition. I concur that boat-inhumations would have generated social memories that bound the living to the dead through mortuary dramas within which varied permutations of material culture, substances and architectures were mobilised as theatrical props. Drawn together with time, labour and acts of sacrifice, boats served in constructing narratives by which the dead were honoured and remembered through mythological narrative (see Price 2010). In particular, it is evident that boat-inhumations involved the deposition of artefacts with striking designs and biographies by which social memories were performed (e.g. Back Danielsson 2010; Price 2010; Williams 2011). Yet it is equally possible that these items have been over-emphasised in our reading of boat-inhumation, especially when it is likely that cremation ceremonies could

have utilised comparable material cultures even though they rarely survive so well in the archaeological record due to the affects of fire. This is perhaps the result of the seductive prominence of material finds among the wealthier boat-inhumations graves, even when subject to subsequent plundering (e.g. Bill & Daly 2012). In contrast, in boat-cremations and other graves of the period this evidence is far less well preserved and lavish. The focus on material culture in the interpretation of boat inhumations might also reflect the influence of the tenth-century account of a boat-cremation on the River Volga by Ibn Fadlan (see also Price 2010). This account's bias is towards the pre-cremation stages of the funeral has drawn attention away from the significance of monument construction for which the observer did not witness first-hand or regarded as less worthy of note for his readers when compared with the more shocking elements of drinking and the sacrifice of animals and a slave-girl. In contrast, the raising of a monumental burial mound marked by a pillar bearing the deceased's name over the pyre-site receives only brief attention by Ibn Fadlan.

A second and related problem is also revealed by this much-used tenth-century text. The account of Ibn Fadlan tells us that a temporary burial of the cadaver in a grave took place for ten days to give time for the considerable preparations for the elite funeral. This seems to have inspired the argument that the Oseberg ship-burial may have been constructed as a long process involving many months when the mound was only part-built and the grave remained open to view. However, this view has now received recent criticism on archaeological grounds. A review of the botanical evidence together with indications of unfinished oars placed in the grave might instead hint at a far more rapid sequence of grave-composition and mound-building (Nordeide 2011). In fact, this is borne out by Ibn Fadlan's account, for while the funeral itself was prolonged by ten days by temporary burial, when conducted it seems that acts were driven at a fast tempo and involved rapid sequences of motion and destruction. Both the archaeological and written sources therefore hint that funerals involving boats were rapid affairs and contained fast-moving performances. Here, the parallel with the scenes on Gotlandic picture stones merits revisiting. Andrén (1993), for example, has noted how the scenes of picture stones focus on the themes of heroism and wisdom in which boats, carriages and horses are presented as key elements in commemorating the dead through mythological narratives. Yet his approach focuses on the meanings of material cultures and vehicles, whereas I suggest the parallel lies also in the movements and actions these artefacts and modes of transportation imply. The boats for instance are depicted in full sail and fully occupied, scudding rapidly over large waves. As frozen motion, picture stones recall past movements and imply future ones for both the living and the dead. This is supported by the increasing evidence for their original mortuary contexts at places of movement, and in funerals that would have involved the physical and conceptual movement of the living and the dead (e.g. Andreeff 2012). I contend that boat-inhumations might have implied a similar tempo in a rather different fashion, drawing upon distinctive aspects of their monumentality and surges in tempo to create memories for the dead.

This paper wishes to expand on, and combine these two critical issues to rethink the significance of boat inhumation. To do this, I wish to focus upon the interaction between movement and tempo in understanding the monuments and landscapes of Viking-period boat-inhumations. More than evidence of social rank, economic wealth or religious affiliation, I propose that the monumentality and landscape settings of boat-inhumations interacted with the boat and the burial assemblage to stage and commemorate via movement and temporality. In particular, I propose boat-graves afforded and constituted the dead as animated and remembered sensing presences among the living communities of Viking-period Scandinavia through this staging of frozen motion, citing past movements and commemorating the potentiality of action of the ancestors into the next world, and just possibly back into the world of the living. By focusing on the topic of death, memory and society in Viking Scandinavia via a boat-inhumation grave in the Swedish region of Östergötland, I hope my paper provides a fitting tribute to the research interests and career of Elisabeth Arwill-Nordbladh.

The boat-grave cemetery at Skamby, Kuddby Parish, Östergötland

With the support of the British Academy, in 2005 I took up an offer to collaborate with Dr Martin Rundkvist in co-directing the excavation of one grave in a cemetery at Skamby in Kuddby parish, Östergötland. Boat inhumation is known as an intermittent practice across Scandinavia during the Vendel and Viking periods. Yet excavations at Skamby in 2005 explored a region where boat-inhumation has rarely been identified (Figs. 1 and 2). As Rundkvist (2011) reports, Skamby is distinctive and important because it is one of only a small number of sites revealing the deployment of boats in different ways in Late Iron Age Östergötland. Elsewhere there are two known ship-shaped stone-settings at Nässjö (Nässjö) and Stångbro in St. Lars (Linköping) and two cremations of ships revealed by large numbers of clench nails; one undated at Solberga (Askeby) and one of mid-Vendel-period date at Vetavallen at Spångsholm (Veta). There are also two other cemeteries, neither dated through excavation, where the surface traces suggest the presence of boats; two possible boat-graves at Norra Berga (Mjölby) and three at Malm (Styrstad). Hence, with ten boat-shaped monuments suggested from its surface features, Skamby is exceptional for the region (Rundkvist 2011: 59). Through our collaborative research, we confirmed that boat-graves were indeed interred at Skamby. We subsequently argued that the choice of boat-inhumation was indicative of one local group, perhaps a wealthy family, adopting a trans-regional Norse elite mortuary tradition with its attendant mythological and ideological associations (Rundkvist & Williams 2008; Williams et al. 2010). This may have served to foster a shared sense of belonging and allegiances within and beyond the locality and by creating the presence of powerful ancestors in the landscape. Simultaneously, this choice of mortuary procedure publicly demarcated the group's distinctive identity from other rivals within the locality and the region.

This previously unexplored cemetery is situated on a NW-SE orientated ridge, located at the centre of the Vikbolandet peninsula at the far east of Östergötland on the Baltic Sea (Fig. 1: Rundkvist & Williams 2008: 69-76). The Skamby boat-graves

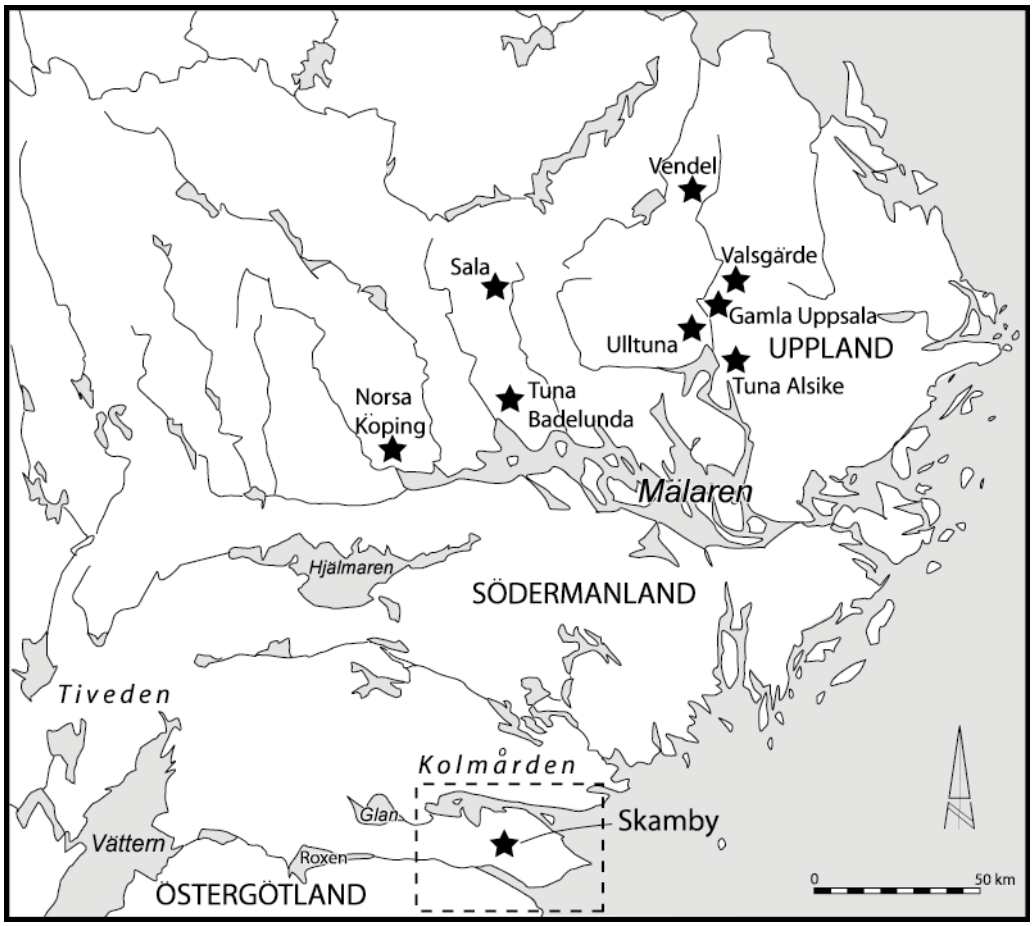

Fig. 1. *Location map of the Skamby cemetery by Howard Williams.*

comprise a discrete burial zone that from surface observation comprises of ten oval stone settings with diagnostic boat-shaped depressions at their centres. The oval monuments with boat-shaped depressions are arranged in a line of eight. Immediately to the north-east of the two most south-easterly in this line are a further two oval stone settings (Figs. 2 and 3). At the north-west end of the ridge there is a discrete cluster of ten smaller circular stone-settings, unexcavated but presumably covering cremation graves.

Metal-detecting around the ridge suggested that the cemetery may have been larger and graves away from the rock outcrop may have been ploughed away. On the ridge, we selected the smallest of the postulated boat-graves to minimise damage to the site, and simultaneously we targeted a monument at the centre of the distribution of the ten postulated boat-graves to reduce the likelihood that the investigation might reveal a chronological outlier.

Fig. 2. *Aerial view of the Skamby cemetery from the NNW. Photo by Jan Norrman, 14 August 1991.*

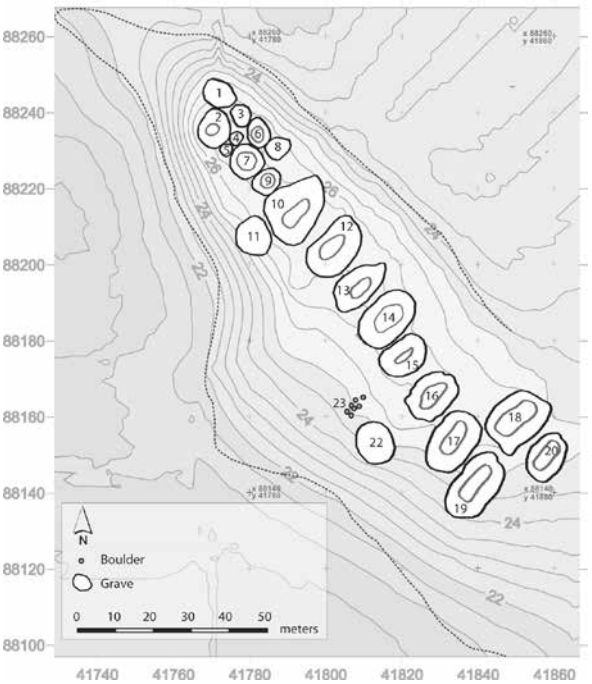

Fig. 3. *Plan of the Skamby cemetery from survey work conducted by Martin Rundkvist and Howard Williams in the 2005 field season. Map by Marcus Andersson.*

Upon removing the turf, we revealed an irregular eight-sided stone-setting with dimensions 11.5 x 9m with a boat-shaped depression comprised of local white, grey and pink granite and some sandstone. There was no distinctive kerb, although larger stones were found towards and perimeter and may have once been uprights demarcating the edge of the monument. At the centre of the stone-setting was a clear line of stone-collapse, flanked halfway along its north-west side by a leaning orthostat that may have once been fully upright and subsequently fell south-east as the chamber and boat decayed (Fig. 4).

Beneath the collapse line we found the clench nails of a poorly preserved boat of around 5m in length (Rundkvist & Williams 2008: 81-82). A notable collection of 23 amber gaming pieces appear to have been placed over rather than within the boat, subsequently scattering amidships with the stones of the monument as the grave-cover collapsed downwards once it had rotted away (Fig. 5: Rundkvist & Williams 2008: 83). The gaming pieces suggested a ninth-century date for the grave and constitute the only dating evidence for the grave (Rundkvist & Williams 2008: 85-86).

Preservation was poor and there was no surviving human or animal bone. Weapons and vessels were also absent. Instead, the remaining repertoire of grave goods was limited to horse gear (an iron hook, frost-nails and bridle) and personal items (a slate pendant whetstone, a red

Fig. 4. *Superstructure of grave 15. Vertical photo collage by Martin Rundkvist and Howard Williams.*

glass paste bead and a small iron knife). We suggested a possible adult male identity for the occupant of grave 15 at Skamby (if there had been only one), although this is far from conclusive (Rundkvist & Williams 2008: 86-87). We noted that the choice to inhume the deceased and the artefacts associated with the grave suggest a high-status burial, especially for a region that has produced few wealthy graves (Rundkvist & Williams 2008: 87-92). The eclectic mix of items was possibly exacerbated by tomb-robbing soon after burial had taken place and prior to the collapse of the chamber within the boat, although

Fig. 5. *Twenty-three amber gaming pieces found in grave 15. Photo by Martin Rundkvist.*

it remains possible that this was originally a far more modest burial rite contrasting with those more lavish boat-inhumations known from the Lake Mälaren area.

The irregular eight-sided stone-setting raised over the grave contrasts with monuments associated with boat-graves elsewhere, supporting the argument that the Skamby cemetery reflects the burial choices of a local group over many decades, even centuries. This family were adapting rather than simply emulating the boat-graves of the Mälaren valley and elsewhere in the Baltic. This strategy may have served to articulate their claims over land and genealogy as well as their political allegiances and maybe their perceived origins (Rundkvist & Williams 2008: 92-93).

Subsequently, the landscape context of the cemetery was considered. It was argued that this cemetery, unique for the region, was strategically located in relation to a maritime artery of communication between Östergötland's heartland and the Baltic coast. Yet simultaneously, the cemetery was located within a cul-de-sac, perhaps close to elite residences and on a ridge selected for its mythological associations (Williams et al. 2010). Subsequently, the site has contributed to

a new regional synthesis of Iron Age archaeology which argues for fluidity, rather than stability, in centres of socio-political power throughout the middle and later first millennium AD (Rundkvist 2011: 79-80). Together these studies point to Skamby as a strategic statement of identity by a local elite social group with maritime connections and (perhaps also) allegiances outside the region of Östergötland (Rundkvist & Williams 2008). By regarding the burial context and its location as a ritual performance, we follow recent studies that regard Viking-Age elites as utilising mortuary drama to configure their identities and materialise mythologies linking past, present and future, involving the selection of material culture and grave-structures to accompany the dead and the form of monument and its location (Jennbert 2006; Price 2010; Thäte 2007).

However, the significance of the stone-setting revealed at Skamby boat inhumation has yet to be explained and here the neglect of consideration given to the monumentality and tempo of performance in recent work on boat-inhumation can be rectified. In relation to recent debates regarding the significance of boat-inhumation, I believe that the Skamby monument reveals some important clues regarding how boat-inhumation operated in relation to a panoply of mortuary choices available to Norse communities. I propose that it was the rapid construction of the monument during the funeral, followed by a slow but tangible post-funeral tempo of enduring presence in the landscape that made this choice of low stone-setting significant. I postulate that boat-inhumations were instead quick architectures built to demarcate and perpetuate the construction process itself, to sustain accessibility to the grave and to choreograph decay. The open and 'transparent' nature of the monument's composition, as well as the visibility of the decay process affecting the boat-inhumation are key to understanding boat-inhumation as a distinctive commemorative strategy. Hence, boat-inhumations covered by low stone-settings, in contrast to other forms of Viking-period grave and boats beneath monumental burial mounds (e.g. Bill & Daly 2012), served to expose and encourage post-funeral engagements with the grave and foster dialogues with the dead rather than to seal and hence close off the burial chamber in a more decisive and permanent way. Once we consider the Skamby boat-inhumation from this perspective, we are required to question whether the monuments can be conceived at all as projects within a closed ritual system that ceased with the initial closing of the grave. I suggest that, conversely, these monuments operated during and after the funeral in more open-ended memory-work utilising space, stone and the biographical management of entropy to create a temporality for the dead as inhabiting the grave.

The materiality of the monument

The monument was revealed at Skamby was distinctive for its unusual oblong and irregularly octagonal shape (Fig. 4). Rural Swedish Viking-period cemeteries are usually dominated by modestly sized mounds and flat round stone settings, with a few four-sided, boat-shaped and triangular stone settings occurring too (Svanberg 2003). The grave 15 stone-setting was certainly very different from the raising of an earth and/or stone mound: the kind of monument which has led archaeologists to associate mound-building

with public and enduring symbols of status and land-claims.

The boat-inhumations at Skamby did not choose to make a statement with the scale and landscape prominence of the large burial mounds found elsewhere in the province (Rundkvist 2011: 57-59) as at Sjögestad Parish, Stora Tollstad. Here, Martin Rundkvist and this author conducted a brief trial excavation in 2006 of Raä 16, one of a group of great barrows, 37m in diameter and 4m in height. Our trench, 2.5m by 1.5m into the northern edge of the mound revealed a cairn covering a half-metre thick layer of charcoal; evidently the very edge of a large cremation pyre sealed by the monument. Dating to the late 8th or early 9th century AD, this is one of only three mounds of over 20m diameter from the province confirmed by excavation as dating to the Viking period (Rundkvist 2011: 123-4). This alternative strategy of elite commemoration is not only different from the Skamby boat-grave in terms of the choice of cremation and the size and shape of the monument, it created a markedly different landmark and challenged the possibility of direct and easy intervention into the grave without extensive excavation.

So how do we understand the elite commemorative significance of boat-inhumation covered by a low stone-setting in the light of these great mounds? First of all, I suggest that the stone setting may not have been particularly difficult or time-consuming to construct; indeed, it may have been rapidly built from available stones on the land surface around and on the ridge. Depending on the number of individuals involved and the distances over which stones had to be moved, we may be looking at a monument that took no more than a day to build. Creating the stone-setting required a significant collective action, but not necessarily a prolonged work project.

Yet there are other qualities to the monument that hint at its significance in the funeral. It is notable that this monument demarcated space more than was an essential part of the boat-grave: the stone-setting was far larger (over double the length and quadruple the width) of the modest-sized craft it covered over. A further fundamental aspect of the monument was its low height; as only one stone thick across much of its surface, it had a minimal height and hence merged with the landscape it augmented. This inconspicuous aspect presumes that there was no superstructure or post-burial robbing of the stone-setting. There might indeed have been a building, posts or other features marking the grave that left no visible trace. Yet both its size and low height suggest that, rather than a landmark, it was intended as a stage for ritual performances. Furthermore, there was no evidence of significant robbing of the structure; the surviving form was remarkably regular given its exposure for over a millennium. Therefore, if we accept the form revealed as broadly reflecting the monument composed in the Viking period, it seems significant that it was inconspicuous but observable within the landscape; on top of the ridge so that it could be widely visible from the immediate surroundings. While precise details of tree-cover are an insurmountable problem in making this claim, it was observed by the author whilst traversing the landscape during the excavation period how noticeable our excavation efforts went with the neighbourhood. Also, locals

were well aware of our presence and absence on a daily basis as we excavated the monument.

A further aspect is that the composition remained on display: the shapes and sizes of stones might have been brought by different groups or work teams. There appears to be no pattern to the size, shape and colour of the stones, yet there were discernible lines and semi-circular lines of stones visible within its make-up. This can be regarded as having materialised the work of construction done by the mourners. Not only does this support the argument for a rapid single-phase construction (rather than these lines indicating long-term stop-points or the reworking and enlargement of an earlier monument), but it makes the point that the end result of the monument failed to obscure, and instead displayed, the results of the labour. Memory-work is thus fossilised for all to see in the patterns and arrangements of stones within a single-phase monumental construction.

This begs the question: was the monument designed to commemorate those composing it by 'framing' as much as covering the boat and thus enshrining the act of building? Certainly, the boat not only contributed to a striking (and possibly quite rapid) funerary process that may have continued to exert an influence on the commemoration of the dead through the monument raised over it. Its presence was implied by the orthostat situated to its north-west. Was this orthostat serving as the boat's mooring, or else a mast commemorating the boat's journey to the cemetery or onwards into the afterlife? What is apparent is that the barely concealed boat was cited by this stone.

Moreover, the monument enshrines the tempo of wooden decay: as the boat decayed, the orthostat collapsed into it. By covering the boat in a thin layer of stones, the rotting and collapsing organic material would create a boat-shaped depression over time. In other words, the destruction of the boat and its covering was visible to all who visited the site months or years after the funeral and may have served to mediate the selective remembering and forgetting of the funeral. Once again, the monument revealed rather than concealed its contents, slowly exhibited in its tempo of decay into the hillside.

Then there is the materiality of memory within the monument. Indeed, the octagonal arrangement might have been a house-platform, built as a ruined foundation for the dead to inhabit. The soil between the stones was packed with burnt daub from the Iron Age settlement that preceded the cemetery: might this have had a significance and bearing on the form of the monument as a re-built house? Meanwhile, at least one of the reused stones bore a cup-mark, might this have been noticed and lent itself to the significance of the monument in some regard?

The relationship between the stone-setting and it immediate natural outcrops also deserves mention. The location of the monument was selected to straddle the apex of the ridge. Yet also, its position allowed it to avoid nearby outcrops and yet cite them with the monument's presence. Immediately to the south of the monument was a large natural outcrop seemingly respected by the monument. Was this significant and did it serve to 'tether' the boat to the ridge?

Hence, this form of monument was more than an investment of time and labour. The stone-setting might have commemorated the dead by serving as a platform for ritual activities and by materialising both its composition and its decay in a distinctive way. If we combine these observations, we can suggest how the stone-setting over grave 15 set up a particular way of citing the history of the ridge, preserving traces of the funeral but also of configuring entropy. Death was commemorated by the raising of the monument, but also by the rituals conducted after the funeral and during the collapse of the monument in the landscape. This might be seen as itself an act of transformation by which means the deceased's personhood were configured and commemorated (see Back Danielsson 2007). Indeed, given the absence of key artefact types found elsewhere, it is possible that grave-robbing was one of the conspicuous acts that took placed *before* the collapse of the burial chamber (*cf.* Bill & Daly 2012).

Memory through citation

Grave 15 was not alone (Fig. 3). While the rest of the cemetery has not been dug the surface traces suggest at least nine other boat-graves built in a similar fashion to grave 15 but much larger still. These are well-ordered, placed in a line along the ridge that forks towards its eastern end as the ridge widens. It seems unquestionable that they were situated in knowledge of, and in relation to, each other. The impression of planning and management is striking. It appears that a 'monumental genealogy' (Williams 2001, 2006) is more clearly articulated through the form of boat-graves at Skamby than at any other Scandinavian site with boat-graves, even Valsgärde (Ljungkvist 2008; Gräslund & Ljungkvist 2011). We do not know whether this was a short-lived genealogical invention or a long-term tradition lasting many centuries. Yet by adding one boat-inhumation to another, the result was of a material history that was impressed upon the ridge beneath distinctive oval stone-settings. The parallel with Valsgärde makes two points worthy of further discussion.

First, plans of cemeteries can afford the impression of design when the precise chronology can reveal a more complex set of shifts in the temporality and development of the cemeteries (Ljungkvist 2008). Yet an element of the Valsgärde cemetery provides close parallels to Skamby; the late tenth-century phase 8, where a series of boat-graves were set out on the western side of the cemetery in relatively rapid succession (Ljungkvist 2008: 46-47; Gräslund & Ljungkvist 2011: 126). This evidence challenges previous understandings of boat-inhumation at Valsgärde as a slow-paced accumulation over many centuries, perhaps afforded to only one individual per generation. Could Skamby represent an earlier, but comparable, rapid succession of high-status individuals afforded boat-inhumation within the same few generations? If so, past graves would be readily remembered by those involved in each subsequent funeral, making Skamby a genealogy in death that may have rapidly intended to project the sense of a long duration of using the site. This 'invented continuity' was cumulative and creative and need not have been the plan or design of a single individual or generation.

The second point goes with this one; whatever the chronology, the succession of boat-inhumations on the ridge created a striking distinction

from the visible forms of earlier and contemporary cemetery monuments in the vicinity; no other cemetery in the area has anything that looks like the oval settings with boat-shaped depressions. While many cemeteries will have been destroyed by agriculture in the medieval and modern eras, we remain with the impression that the enduring footprint of the boat-inhumation monuments was intentionally outstanding. Indeed, the contrast was made palpable within the Skamby cemetery itself, because at the north-west end of the ridge are a cluster of ten circular stone-settings that may well cover cremation burials given their relatively diminutive size. There are a number of scenarios to explain what these represent that require testing through further archaeological investigation. First, they might be contemporaneous burials of elite females buried adjacent to their male counterparts interred in the boat-graves. If the Skamby cemetery is not an exclusive burial zone bisected on gender lines, alternatively, these circular monuments might be individuals of a different social identity or status. Finally, they might be traces of an earlier, larger cemetery, partially overwritten by the boat-inhumation graves further south-east on the ridge. Whether contemporary or successive, the division between oval boat-graves and circular stone-settings came to dominate the burial space and mark the boat-inhumations as distinctive. To summarise, it appears that boat-inhumation at Skamby was a distinctive strategy for mapping genealogy within cemetery space, invoking memories through movement between and around the graves.

Memory in place

Elsewhere I have explored how the cemetery was located in a peripheral easterly location for Östergötland but in a strategic position when considered on the local scale, being as far as possible from the sea and yet in a region that may have controlled maritime routes in and out of Östergötland (Williams et al. 2010). But why specifically was the boat-grave cemetery located on a ridge at Skamby and not elsewhere in the watershed of the Gisselöån stream and its tributaries? The immediate topography of Skamby was utilised to orchestrate the experience of the funerary processions: a place was chosen that offered a theatrical setting for funerals visible from all around. The landscape alluded to *inherited, invented* and *imagined* elements, but it also allowed the dead to *inhabit* the landscape (Williams 2006: 198-200). Yet the immediate archaeological context and topography of the cemetery and its environs are also revealing. Two finds immediately to the west of the boat-inhumation cemetery and one to the south-east suggest contemporary settlements were not far away (Rundkvist 2011: 113-15).

The Skamby boat-graves are on a low ridge which is in broad terms a location comparable to that of most surviving coeval cemeteries in Östergötland. For example, this is the pattern for all the sites both east and upstream towards Östra Ny and west and downstream towards Kuddby and then south and further downstream to Ring. In the immediate environs though, Skamby has distinctive features that it does not share with any of these other sites. It is situated on one of only three ridges that sit in a line within the surrounding plain on the north side of the Gisselöån

stream. With the exception of stone settings and mounds on the other two ridges east but close to Skamby, in stark contrast, the other surviving cemeteries in the area are located on the valley sides, not upon ridges within the valley. Unlike other cemeteries, it is therefore a low-lying site and close to the stream. Before Gisselöån was canalised in post-medieval times, the valley floor south of the ridge was likely a small lake or fen. It is from here that boats would have been hauled on their final journey to the grave; whether containing the body or joining it at the cemetery. Therefore, the location may have been geared to the choice of funerary rite and linked to procession by water during the funeral. Elsewhere, I have argued that Skamby was the closest one could get to a Viking-period cul-de-sac (Williams et al. 2010). While the cemetery may have been passed by on local land routes, I suggest that, unlike many cemeteries of the time constructed beside roads, rivers and lakes (Thäte 2009), this cemetery was a maritime 'dead-end'.

Once the mourners reached the ridge, they were afforded the potential for all-round views from the cemetery (depending of course upon tree cover) in contrast to the directed views of hillside cemeteries that form the majority of other nearby sites. Likewise, the Skamby boat-graves sit squarely on top of their ridge and were potentially visible (again depending on tree cover) from all directions. As well as being near the stream, the Skamby ridge is also set apart from the surrounding hills, and therefore has something of an 'island' quality with prominence from all main approaches apart from directly from the east. Yet, the ridge is as much overlooked as it provides overlook; forming a stage for elaborate funerals visible from encircling ridges and hills and the cemeteries and farms along the valley sides. In combination, these qualities suggest it is possible that, at least for the *immediate* context of the cemetery, the boat-graves were situated in an 'extrovert' and 'semi-public' location and upon an 'exclusive', restricted space provided by the narrow ridge closest to water (Gansum & Østigård 2004: 65).

The Skamby location therefore enjoyed a distinctive relationship to the *inhabited* landscape of settlements, but also was located to be visible from the sites of existing cemeteries that encircle the ridge on all sides. Rather than being *in* an earlier cemetery, it was set apart but visible *from* earlier cemeteries. There are clear instances where older monuments are referenced and reused in Viking period ship-settings and boat-graves (Thäte 2007). But the Skamby cemetery appears to have begun with a clean slate in a new location away from pre-existing cemeteries. A fallen orthostat north of the ridge and an Early Roman Period brooch found nearby by metal detector suggest that the site was a cemetery around AD 100. But then there is no further evidence of burial until after AD 800. The 2005 excavation revealed that grave 15 was built over the site of a far earlier Iron Age settlement site, probably inhabited in and after the second century BC (Rundkvist et al. 2007). Settlements of that era left no visible trace above ground, and it is debatable whether the burnt daub and potsherds incorporated into the Viking period monument had any great significance in the thinking of that period. It would certainly have been labour-intensive to *remove* the settlement material from the fabric of the grave.

Whether or not the Viking period architects of the cemetery were aware of the thousand-year-old settlement remains under their feet, they chose to lay out their monuments on top of the culture layer with a high-degree of organisation. No other boat-grave cemetery in Sweden has such a strictly linear arrangement. Moreover, even a cursory examination of cemeteries in the region as well as the plans of published sites elsewhere in southern and central Sweden finds few parallels to Skamby in terms of its spatial organisation and defined character (e.g. Svanberg 2003: 155-335). Partly this may be illusory, as further burials appear to have been ploughed away at the foot of the ridge (revealed by metal-detected artefacts that might have come from ploughed-out inhumation graves: Rundkvist 2011: 113), but the fact remains that the boat-graves themselves were all placed on top of the ridge indicates a continuity of purpose. Whatever the duration of the cemetery's use for boat-graves, monument re-use was not the principal element at play in selecting the location.

A further quality of this location is that the ridge may relate to the *imagined* qualities of landscape. It is boat-shaped, certainly at its western end. This quality is not unique in the glacier-scarred landscape of the Vikbolandet peninsula, but in the immediate context the ridge appears to share this shape with only the two neighbouring ridges to the cemetery's east. The orientation of the ridge may also be significant, from NW to SE, allowing the boat-graves the orientation SW to NE when orientated across the ridge back – a seemingly auspicious orientation for Viking-period graves including the Valsgärde and Vendel cemeteries as well as ship-settings. Indeed, it is possibly connected to an early perception of the cardinal points and the 'road to Hel'. Therefore, the shape and orientation of the ridge may have been deemed auspicious, and even afforded it and its neighbours sacred associations. In summary, the place of the boat-grave cemetery commemorated through movement, remembering the movements of the living, the movements of the funeral, and perhaps also through burying a boat, the site's riverine location and the topography of the rock outcrop selected, invoking senses of movement into the afterlife. The boat-graves were thus frozen movement, implying past and future journeys from that spot.

Conclusion

It might be argued that Skamby's monuments held a discrete set of relationships between movement and tempo that marked them distinct from other wealthy burial mounds of the Viking period. The distinctive low ridge out in the plain may have been seen as an auspicious location for the boat-grave cemetery through its shape and orientation, its exclusivity from existing Iron Age cemeteries, and its proximity to water at a maritime 'dead end'. The site had many qualities that made it an appropriate location for a local elite to perform their identities and group histories, materialise them in distinctive monuments and leave them visible within the local landscape (Gansum & Østigård 2004: 76). It appears that, in all these ways, the monument and location was chosen to suit the meanings and metaphors of the burial rite as a pause within a journey involving both the living and the dead. It is possible that the site's combined qualities of the setting and of

the monument meant that it was perceived as a sacred or mythological space within the local environment and a place where the dead 'lived', looking out upon the living or places whence they regularly returned by ship (see also Williams 1999, 2006: 203-204). Therefore, the cemetery's regional and local marginality obscure its immediate 'centrality' as a place of memory in which composition was commemorated, performances took place, the dead were animated and accessible, movements were fossilised and decay was put on show. It was by freezing motion that movement and temporality became central to the message of the Viking-period boat-inhumation practices and rendered them places animated by memories of the deceased, and possibly the sense that the deceased still inhabited the grave. Bill and Daly (2012) have recently interpreted the tomb-robbing of the ninth-century Oseberg and Gokstad boat-inhumations from Vestfold, Norway as public displays of power politics of the mid- to late tenth century. Yet the evidence from the far more modest grave and monument at Skamby goes further to explain how and why these boat-inhumations remaining powerful presences in the landscape long after the funerals had ended.

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